

Message Text

PAGE 01 BANGKO 16278 171619Z

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AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSULATE UDORN

SUMTMA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2042

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S E C R E T BANGKOK 16278

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PINS, MARR, TH

SUBJECT : THAI ATTITUDES TOWARD THE US MILITARY PRESENCE

SUMMARY. IN THEIR AGITATION AGAINST THE THANOM GOVERNMENT, THE STUDENTS STRESSED DOMESTIC ISSUES, AND THE US MILITARY PRESENCE DID NOT FIGURE PROMINENTLY, IN PART BECAUSE OF WITHDRAWALS WE HAVE ALREADY MADE. THE NEW SANYA CARETAKER GOVERNMENT IS ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE AND IS NOT EXPECTED TO QUESTION THE TRADITIONAL CLOSE US-THAI RELATIONSHIP. HOWEVER, QUESTIONS ARE ALREADY SURFACING BY THE STUDENTS AND OTHERS ABOUT AMERICAN SUPPLY OF VEHICLES AND WEAPONS USED BY POLICE AND ARMY AGAINST THE STUDENT RIOTERS. RADICAL AND NATIONALISTIC ELEMENTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO AGITATE FOR US TROOP WITHDRAWALS AND THE AMERICAN PRESENCE WILL PROBABLY BE AN ISSUE IN ANY ELECTION CAMPAIGN WHICH FOLLOWS. END SUMMARY.

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 16278 171619Z

1. ALTHOUGH STUDENT AGITATORS IN EARLIER PERIODS HAD USED ATTACKS ON THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND AS A MEANS OF CRITICIZING THE THANOM GOVERNMENT, THE OCTOBER DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH EVENTUALLY BROUGHT DOWN THE GOVERNMENT

WERE FOCUSED ON MORE INTERNAL THAI ISSUES. SOME SPEAKERS ADDRESSING THE STUDENT CROWDS AT THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY OR INDULGING IN HYDE PARK SOAP BOX SPEECHES RAISED THE ISSUE OF AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THE AMERICAN PRESENCE WAS NEVER TRANSLATED INTO AN ACTION ISSUE OR LISTED AMONG THE STUDENT DEMANDS. FORTUNATELY WE HAD HELPED DEFUSE THIS ISSUE BY AGREEING TO FORCE REDUCTIONS IN SEPTEMBER.

; 2. THERE WERE ALSO NO KNOWN ATTACKS ON OR MOVES AGAINST AMERICAN INSTALLATIONS, AND TWO ALERTS PROVED GROUNDLESS. ON 15 OCTOBER WHEN POLICE AND MILITARY SECURITY FORCES HAD RETREATED TO THE SAFETY OF THEIR STATIONS AND CANTONMENTS, THERE WERE REPORTS THAT STUDENTS PLANNED TO DEMONSTRATE AT TWO BANGKOK OFFICE BUILDINGS OCCUPIED BY US MILITARY, INCLUDING CLASSIFIED INSTALLATIONS; NO DEMONSTRATIONS MATERIALIZED AND IT NOW APPEARS THAT THE RUMORS MAY HAVE ORIGINATED AMONG UNEASY THAI EMPLOYEES. REPORTS ALSO REACHED THE EMBASSY THAT 2,000 STUDENTS WERE PLANNING TO MARCH ON UBON AIR BASE, AND APPROPRIATE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WERE TAKEN BY THE THAI BASE COMMANDER, BUT THE STUDENTS MARCHED PAST THE BASE HEADED DOWNTOWN TO COLLECT SUPPORT FOR THEIR BANGKOK COLLEAGUES, US MILITARY ADVISERS ATTACHED TO VARIOUS THAI UNITS WERE COURTEOUSLY REQUESTED TO GO HOME AND CHANGE TO CIVIES, BUT THIS ADVICE WAS CLEARLY FOR THEIR OWN PROTECTION AT A TIME WHEN THE THAI MILITARY WERE DOING THE SAME THING TO LOWER THEIR PROFILE AND WHEN TAXI DRIVERS WERE REPORTED TO BE REFUSING TO PICK UP MEN IN MILITARY UNIFORM.

3. PRIME MINISTER SANYA AND HIS CARETAKER GOVERNMENT ARE NOT EXPECTED TO TAKE BOLD INITIATIVES OR SUBSTANTIALLY ALTER THE DIRECTION TO THAI NATIONAL POLICY. WE WOULD EXPECT THE KING'S INFLUENCE ALSO TO STRENGTHEN SANYA'S PREDILECTION TOWARD MAINTAINING CLOSE TIES WITH THE US AND SOME AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND AS A GUARANTEE OF THAI NATIONAL SECURITY. THIS SHOULD PROVIDE US A BREATHING SPACE, PARTICULARLY WHILE THE NEW CABINET SHAKES DOWN AND ATTEMPTS TO DEAL WITH MORE PRESSING

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 16278 171619Z

ISSUES SUCH AS THE INFLATION AND OTHER ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH CONTRIBUTED HEAVILY TO PUBLIC DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME.

4. AT THE SAME TIME WE MUST EXPECT THAT THE US WILL BE A TARGET FOR CRITICISM BY RADICAL AND NATIONALIST GROUPS. THE DEMONSTRATIONS HAD HARDLY CEASED BEFORE QUESTIONS BEGAN TO BE RAISED IN SOME QUARTERS REGARDING THE AMERICAN SUPPLY OF SOME ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT USED BY THE POLICE AND ARMY IN THE SHOOTINGS ON 14-15 OCTOBER IN CENTRAL BANGKOK. CERTAIN ELEMENTS AMONG THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND OTHERS HOPING TO CAPITALIZE ON THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT, CAN BE EXPECTED AFTER THE HONEYMOON PERIOD TO SEEK PROFIT FROM THE

ISSUE OF AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR AND ASSOCIATION WITH PRIME
MINSITER THANOM AND HIS GOVERNMENT.

5. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY INDICATED THAT IT WILL
RECOGNIZE THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND AS A
PRINCIPALPOWER GROUP TO BE CONSULTED AND MOLLIFIED.
SINCE WE EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT TO FIND GREAT DIFFICULTY
IN MEETING IMMEDIATELY STUDENT EXPECTATIONS IN MANY
AREAS OF DOMESTIC REFORM, THERE MAY WELL BE A GROWING
TEMPTATION TO MAKE SOME CONCESSIONS TO LEFT WING PRESSURE ON
ISSUES AFFECTING THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE HERE. INCIDENTS,
HOWEVER MINOR, INVOLVING
US MILITARY PRESENCE CAN BE
EXPECTED TO BE MAGNIFIED IN THE LOCAL THAI PRESS AND CITED AS
EVIDENCE OF DELETERIOUS EFFECTS FROM THE AMERICAN PRESENCE.

6. PRIME MINISTER SANYA HAS COMMITTED HIMSELF PUBLICLY
TO PROMULGATION OF A CONSTITUTION WITHIN 6 MONTHS AND
THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS SOON THEREAFTER, ALTHOUGH THE
POLITICAL PARTIES ARE IN A STATE OF DISARRAY
AFTER TWO YEARS' DENIAL OF ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES WE MUST
EXPECT A RAPID INCREASE IN POLITICAL MANEUVERING AS
THE POLITICIANS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION TO STAKE OUT GROUND FOR THE COMING ELECTION
CONTEST. THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND
AND THE ALLIANCE WITH THE US WILL INEVITABLY FIGURE
PROMINENTLY AMONG THE ISSUES RAISED. WHOEVER MAY
SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 16278 171619Z

WIN THE ELECTION, IT IS LIKELY THAT DURING THE
CAMPAIGN THEY WOULD BE COMMITTED TO THE ELECTORATE
ON THEIR POLICY TOWARD THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE.

7. WE DO NOT EXPECT STRONG PRESSURES FROM THE RTG
AGAINST THE US PRESENCE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTRUE. WE DO,
HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT THESE PRESSURESSILL GROW AND
THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL FEEL IT MUST RESPOND TO
THEM. IN THE INTEREST OF MAINTAINING OUR ABILITY OVER THE
LONGER RUN TO KEEP A PRESENCE IN THAILAND, WE BELIEVE IT
IMPORTANT THAT WE CONTINUE ON AN EVEN COURSE
PURSUANT TO OUR COMMITMENT TO WORK OUT WITH THE RTG AN ORDERLY
AND PHASED FURTHER REDUCTION IN US FORCES PRESENTLY IN THAILAND,
CONSISTENT WITH OUR MILITARY REQUIREMENTS.
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